The Land of Egypt in the Holy Scriptures

Contributed by Website Admin
Tuesday, 05 May 2015

EGYPT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first mention of Egypt in the Old Testament is in Gen 12:10, where we are told that "there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there." Egypt is mentioned once again in Gen 13:10: "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt."

Egypt was a land of plenty, described as being even as the garden of the Lord. The Lord allowed Joseph to be sold to the Egyptians by his brothers, in order to bring Israel and his children into Egypt, where for more than 400 years, the church of the Old Testament would be nurtured in Egypt.

When the time came for the Lord to bring His people out of Egypt, he allowed Moses to be raised by Pharaoh's daughter, and we are told "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." (Acts 7:22)

But the major story about Egypt in the Old Testament is without a doubt the story of Exodus. A simplistic way of looking upon the Exodus account is to view it as a good guys versus bad guys story, the good guys win and the bad guys loose. If, on the other hand we look more carefully at the account in Exodus, we will find a totally different story emerging.

In Exodus 7:3, the Lord tells Moses, "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." One may wonder, why would the Lord harden Pharaoh's heart, and then punish the Egyptians by visiting the ten plagues upon them? But the answer to this query comes in Exodus 7:5, where the Lord explains, "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them."

The key verse here is, "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." This was God's plan for the salvation of the Egyptians. The Lord wanted to bring them into His fold. But the Lord knew that the Egyptians were stubborn and proud and that the only way to bring them into His fold was to bring them to their knees.

Again, in Exodus 14:4 "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.

Exodus 14:17 "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord."

In a most emphatic way, the lord tells Moses that the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And it worked, for when the Lord troubles the host of the Egyptians and takes off their chariot wheels (Ex 14:24,) the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them. (Ex 14:25)

A similar encounter between the Egyptians and the Lord happened 900 years later, in the time of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. When Nebuchadnezzar set siege to Jerusalem, the Egyptians incited the Israelis to resist, promising them military assistance. This was contrary to the word of the Lord through Jeremiah, who told the Israelis to submit themselves to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, for the Babylonian exile was fore-ordained by the Lord. The Egyptians were thus a stumbling block unto Judah, and for this the Lord visited them with another set of plagues that are described in the Book of Ezekiel.

In Ez. 29:3-6 the Lord says, "Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales. And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord" The same words used in Exodus are used here.

- Ez. 29:9 "And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am the Lord."
- Ez. 30:8 "And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and when all her helpers shall be destroyed."
- Again and again we are told that the object of these plagues is to bring the Egyptians to the knowledge of the Lord.
- Ez. 30:13,19 "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also destroy their idols, and I will cause their images to cease out of Noph; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. Thus will I execute judgments in Egypt: and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Here it becomes more clear, I will destroy their idols and cause the images to cease, a strong indication of the conversion of the Egyptians from idol worship to the knowledge of the Lord.
- Ez. 30:25 But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am the Lord.
- Ez. 30:26 And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I am the Lord.
- Ez. 32:15 When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country shall be destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, then shall they know that I am the Lord.

What the Lord is telling Ezekiel here is this, when I have broken the idols of the Egyptians, not only their idols of stone, but also their idols of pride, of arrogance, of obstinacy, when I bring them down to their knees, only then will they know that I am the Lord.

The Book of Isaiah, summarizes for us the dealings of the Lord with the Egyptians in Is. 19:22 "And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them."

You see, the Egyptians needed to be smitten, in order to return to the Lord, and be healed by the lord. The smiting came in the time of Moses and in the time of Ezekiel, the healing came later, when in MAT 2:13, we are told that, "the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

The coming of the Lord into the land of Egypt to seek refuge from the tyranny of Herod was the healing and the reconciliation that came after the smiting. Like a loving Father Who chastens and corrects then he reconciles and heals.

Isaiah prophesies about the coming of the lord into Egypt in Is. 19:1, "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it."

Then in Is. 19:19-21, we are told about the beginning of the Church of Egypt: "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it."

The altar to the Lord in the Land of Egypt is not an Old Testament altar, for it was not lawful to have any altar except in Jerusalem, it is the spiritual altar of the New Testament. And the sacrifice and oblation mentioned are not Old Testament sacrifices, which could only be offered in Jerusalem, they are the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist.

The story has a very happy ending in Is. 19:25 where we are told that, "the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people." Egypt becomes the only nation among the gentiles to be called "my people" by the Lord. And in return for the plagues Egypt receives a blessing from the Lord, "Blessed be Egypt my people."

EGYPT IN THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD

Two-hundred years before the advent of our Lord, something monumental happened in Egypt, when Ptolemy, king of Egypt ordered the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. We cannot possibly over-estimate this historical feat, which made possible to the Gentile world to get to know the Old Testament in the lingua franca of the time; Greek. The translation was done by 70 Jewish Scholars and thus the Translation became known As the Septuagint. This translation was a necessary step for the propagation of the Greek New Testament which was to take place 200 years later. Allow me to quote what Cleveland Coxe wrote about this important milestone:

"The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures to the dialect of the Hellenes, and the creation of a new terminology in the language of the Greeks, by which ideas of faith and of truth might find access to the mind of a heathen world, were preliminaries to the preaching of the Gospel to mankind and to the composition of the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour."[2]

St Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons in France , who lived between 120 -201 A.D. wrote this about the Septuagint Translation,

"For the Apostles agree with the afore-said translation; and the translation harmonizes with the tradition of the apostles.

For Peter, John, Matthew, and Paul and the rest successively, as well as their followers, did set forth all prophetical announcements just as the interpretation of the elders contains them."[3]

It is a pity that the translators of the King James Bible chose to translate from a Hebrew manuscript of the 13th century, rather than the time honoured Egyptian translation of the Old Testament dating to 200 B.C. Today, the Old Testament that was known to the Apostles survives only in the Coptic version used by the Egyptian Church. To justify this bold assertion, allow me give you one example.

Justin Martyr, a Christian Apologist, who lived 110-165 AD., and died as a martyr, writes under the heading THE CRUCIFIXION PREDICTED,

"And again in another prophecy, the Spirit of Prophecy, through David, intimated that Christ, after he had been crucified , should reign again, and spoke as follows: ‘Let all the earth fear before His face, let it be established and not shaken. Let them rejoice among the nations, The Lord hath reigned from the tree.'"[4]

Justin Martyr is here quoting Psalm 96 as it was known in his days. Since the Apology is written to Jews, then the psalm must have been known in this form to both Jews and Christians. To Justin, as well as to the other ancients, the words "The Lord hath reigned from the tree" were a prophetic utterance about the tree of the cross. Now if you look up this Psalm in any Bible published by the Bible society, or indeed any other Bible, you will find the last verse reading "declare among the heathens that the Lord reigneth" the words "from the tree," which to the ancients were a prophecy about the Cross are missing. They are missing even from the currently available Septuagint, which has been harmonized with the Hebrew. They survive only in the Egyptian Psalter which is used by the Egyptians in their every day devotion.

To conclude this part of my address, allow me to share with you the words of Irenaeus, that he wrote 18 centuries ago,

"God has preserved for us the unadulterated Scriptures in Egypt, where the house of Jacob flourished, fleeing from the famine in Canaan, where also our Lord was preserved when He fled from the persecution which was set on foot by Herod."[5]

EGYPT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Good News of the New Testament were preached in Egypt at a very early time. The Book of Acts tells us that on the day of Pentecost, among those converted by the Apostles were, "devout men from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) We are later told that those included people from Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene.

These newly converted Christians must have started spreading the Good News as soon as they were back into their own countries. The Church historian Eusebius speaks of small communities of these new converts already forming around Lake Mareotis in Lower Egypt. They were called Therapeutae, or healers, because people brought the sick to them to be healed, and those who were afflicted by unclean spirits to be cleansed.

Not only did these Therapeutae heal the people's physical illnesses, but they also healed them from their spiritual illnesses by turning them back from the worship of idols to the knowledge of the true God.[6] The oldest Biblical papyri were found in Egypt. Some of these, in the Coptic language were found buried in the sands of remote regions in Upper Egypt, a testimony to the rapid spread of Christianity into Egypt. Most of these predate the oldest authoritative Greek versions of the Scripture in the fourth and fifth centuries including the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus, the Vaticanus, and the Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus. ... Fragments of those papyri dating from the second century, in both Coptic and Greek, are to be found in numerous manuscript repositories in the world. The most monumental collection is the Chester Beatty Papyri, now in Dublin, Ireland.[7]

According to our tradition, Egypt was the place where the first Epistle of St. Peter was written. It was also the place where the Gospel according to St. Mark was written.

Some commentators believe that the Epistle to the Hebrews was also written in Egypt and that its author was Apollos.

How and when did St. Peter visit Egypt where he wrote his first Epistle is the subject of great speculation. According to Dr. Samir Girgis, the visit must have followed St. Peter's miraculous release from prison reported in Acts 12, which is dated A.D. 43[8]

Acts 12 tells us that after his release by the Angel, Peter came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. (Acts 12:12) Peter told those gathered how the Lord had brought him out of the prison, asked them to bring the good news to James and the brethren, then he departed and went to another place. Acts 12:19 tells us that the next morning, Herod, looked for peter everywhere but could not find him. It is very safe to assume that Peter left the country, knowing that Herod intended to kill him after the Passover (Acts 12:4)

It is possible that, following the example of his Master, he fled into Egypt, accompanied by John Mark. Mark who was

raised up in Lybia, must have taken the trip to Jerusalem, once a year, passing through Egypt, and would make an excellent travel companion to Saint Peter. Coming to Egypt, there were two places where they might take refuge among the Jewish community, one of them was Alexandria, with its large Greek speaking Jewish community, and the other was Babylon, an ancient city, the ruins of which are still visible on the outskirts of modern day Cairo. Babylon had a sizeable Jewish minority and a large Synagogues, and it was there that they must have remained until the death of king Herod in A.D. 44. It was there that St. Peter must have written his first Epistle.

This date also agrees with the assertions of Josephus, Eusebius and others that St. Mark's first entry into Egypt was in the year 43 A.D.[9]

There is internal evidence for this in the Epistle. First, it is addressed to "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bythinya." This means Jewish Christians dispersed among gentiles.

In his letter to the Galatians written in the year 50 A.D., St. Paul addresses "the churches of Galatia." This means that by 50 A.D. there were already established churches in Galatia, and had First peter been written after that, Saint peter would have never addressed his letter to "strangers scattered throughout Galatia" but rather to the churches of Galatia. Actually churches in the areas mentioned in First Peter were founded by St. Paul in his first missionary Journey which started in 47 A.D. which makes the date of First Peter earlier than 47 A.D. and makes the proposed date of 43 A.D. very plausible

The ending of the Epistle, says, "The church which is at Babylon, elected together with you salutes you, and so doth Mark my son." The suggestion that Babylon is a code name for Rome is without merit, since there is no Biblical evidence that Saint Peter preached in Rome at such an early date. The Book of Acts which ends with St. Paul's imprisonment in Rome 61-63 does not mention anything about St. Peter being there. And to suggest a date of writing later than 63 is inconceivable for the reasons we mentioned earlier

The content of the Epistle, also reinforces the argument that St. Peter wrote it after fleeing Jerusalem. The Theme is one of encouragement of early Christians dispersed because of persecution (like St. Peter himself, who fled Jerusalem because of the persecution.)

If we accept this chronology, then First Peter would be the first of all New Testament writings, and Egypt would be the place where it was written.

Saint Mark came to Egypt once again 18 years later, this time to Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, entering there in the year 61 A.D. It was there that he founded the Coptic Church of Egypt, established an ecclesiastical hierarchy that would remain un-interrupted until the present time, wrote his Gospel, and it was there that he died as a martyr on Easter day of the year 68 A.D.

Because of this early evangelization of Egypt and the speed with which Christianity spread throughout the land, the Egyptians were among the first to spread the message of the Bible in lands far and near.

As early as the second century, we hear of Saint Demetrius, the 12th patriarch of Alexandria sending Pantaenus, the dean of the School of Alexandria to convert the Hindus. on the way back, he visits Yemen.[10] Towards the end of the 3rd Century, the sojourn and later martyrdom of the Egyptian Theban legion was the catalyst to the conversion of the pagans in Switzerland, southern Germany and Northern Italy.[11] By the 4th century, Nubia, Ethiopia , Libya and Pentapolis have already been converted by Egyptian missionaries. The Irish tell us that they have 7 Egyptian monks buried in Ireland. They came to preach to the Irish long before St. Patrick set foot on Irish soil.[12]

The British tell us about Egyptian missionary enterprises in Britain especially around Glastonbury. I will conclude this part by quoting the eminent British historian Stanley Lane-Poole, who wrote,

"We do not yet know how much we in the British Isles owe to these remote hermits. It is more than probable that to them we are indebted for the first preaching of the Gospel in England, where, till the coming of Augustine, the Egyptian monastic rule prevailed. But more important is the belief that Irish Christianity, the great civilizing agent of the early Middle Ages among the northern nations, was the child of the Egyptian Church."[13]

EGYPT AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Book of Acts tells us about an Egyptian convert from Judaism called Apollos. Acts 18 describes him as an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in the spirit, who spoke boldly in the synagogues and mightily convinced the Jews , shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. (Act 18: 24-28) He was so good, that when he went to Corinth, he caused a problem, for it seems that the intelligentsia of that city who liked his sophistication took him as their champion. That unfortunately led to a division in that church. When Apollos learned of this he withdrew from the scene as we are told by St. Paul in 1 C0 16:12. We hear nothing more about Apollos in the Book of Acts. Some

believe that, when he heard about Saint Mark's successful preaching in Alexandria, Apollos' native city, he returned to that city to work with Saint Mark.

Coxe tells us that "The genius of Apollos was revived in his native city, A succession of doctors was there to arise, like him, ‘eloquent men and mighty in the scriptures.'" He was speaking about the great school of Alexandria that he very strongly believes was founded by Apollos.[14]

The school of Alexandria is described by Eusebius as ancient, and St. Jerome dates its origin to the time of the Apostles. A school that, for the next 4 centuries, will make Alexandria "The brain of Christendom."[15] "All the learning of Christendom may be traced to this source," declares Coxe.[16]

We know very little about the men who taught in the school until 175 A.D., when we hear of Pantaenus as the head of that school. It was this Pantaenus that was sent on a missionary journey to India by Archbishop Demetrius of Egypt. Pantaenus was a stoic philosopher, who embraced Christianity when his mind discovered that true philosophy was only to be found in Nazareth, in Gesthemane, in Gabbatha and in Golgotha; and he set himself to make it known to the world.[17]

Clement of Alexandria who was a pupil of Pantaenus, succeeded him as dean of the School at the close of the second century. Saint Jerome pronounces him "the most learned of all the ancients" while Eusebius calls him, "an incomparable master of Christian Philosophy." But Clement pales when compared to his pupil Origen, who succeded him as dean of the school of Alexandria at age 18. Dr. F. H. Scrivner, one of the best Biblical Scholars writes this about him,

"Origen is the most celebrated biblical critic of antiquity. His is the highest name among the critics and the expositors of the early church. He is perpetually engaged in the discussion of various reading of the New Testament ... seldom have such warmth of fancy and so bold a grasp of mind been united with the life-long , patient industry which procured for this famous man the honourable appellation of ‘Adamantius.'"[18]

Origen wrote more than 6000 tracts mostly about the Bible, and it is said that the average man cannot finish reading what he wrote in a lifetime.[19] He did that by doing what Master chess players do when they match wits with several players at the same time. He would be working on several books in the same time, dictating a paragraph to this scribe then moving on to dictate a paragraph of a different book to another scribe and so on. Origen's crowning achievement is his Hexapla, a collation of texts of the Bible in six columns from Greek and Hebrew sources, which he compared and annotated diligently. His labours in exegesis went beyond those of any other expositor, for he wrote most detailed commentaries on every book of the Old Testament and the New.[20]

Origen introduced the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible, a method that suggests that besides the literal meaning of the Biblical text, there is a hidden spiritual meaning. A brilliant example of this is his assertion that the Song of Songs is a book about the love between Christ and the Church or Christ and the human soul, and not only about the love between Solomon and one of his one thousand wives!

Origen was succeeded as dean by his pupil Heraclas , who later became Archbishop of Alexandria around the middle of the 3rd century and became the first Church leader in history to receive the title "Pope" six centuries before the bishops of Rome started to claim that dignity.[21]

St. Dionysius the Great, another pupil of Origen, succeeded Heraclas as Dean of the school of Alexandria, in the year 232 A.D. and upon Heraclas' repose in the year 246 A.D., he became the Pope of Alexandria and the 14th head of the Egyptian Church, counting Saint Mark as its first head.

We are told that "His pen was never idle; his learning and knowledge of the scriptures are apparent even in the fragments that have come down to us, and his fidelity to the tradition received from Origen and Heraclas are not less conspicuous."[22]

In an age where anathemas were hurled right left and centre, this brilliant Biblical scholar dared to call to question the attribution of the Book of Revelation to the writer of the fourth Gospel and the three Johanine Epistles. He admits that the Book of Revelation is divinely inspired, he often quotes from it. He is filled with awe by it as he tells us here, "Having formed an idea of it as a composition exceeding my capacity of understanding ... I do not reject what I do not understand, but I am only the more filled with wonder at it, in that I have not been able to discern its import."[23]

He admits that its author of Revelation is called John, but whether this John is the Son of Zebedee that wrote the Gospel and the three Epistles, he has his reservations, that are summarized as follows:

The author of Revelation tells us that his name is John more than once, while the Evangelist never proclaims himself either in the Gospel or in the Epistles.

The character, the form of expression, the whole disposition and execution of the Book of Revelation is different from the

others.

The ideas, expressions and collocations of the author of Revelation are different from those of the author of the Gospel and Epistles.

The Gospel and the Epistles agree with each other. He lists 21 words or phrases that are commonly used in both the gospel and the Epistles but are not found in Revelation.

The Gospel and the Epistles are not only without actual errors as regards the Greek language, but were also written with the greatest elegance both in their expressions and their reasoning and in the whole structure of their style, while the writer of Revelation on the other hand uses a dialect and a language that is not of the exact Greek type, and often uses barbarous idioms and solecisms.

Neither the Gospel nor the Epistles make any mention of Revelation, and Revelation makes no mention of the Gospel or the Epistles.

He then tells us that he writes this not to deny the value of the Book of Revelation but rather to set right this matter of dissimilarity subsisting between these writings.

Today, some people claim that literary criticism is the brain-child of German Biblical scholars of the 19th century. I beg to disagree. For what we have summarized above is an example of literary criticism in its purest form, already in use by an Egyptian Biblical scholar in the 3rd century. Literary criticism is only one of the tools of Biblical and Theological scholarship that were forged in the School of Alexandria, as we are told by the Editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers,

"It was in this school that the technical formulas of the Church were naturally wrought out. The process is like that of the artist who has first to make his own tools. He does many things, and resorts to many contrivances, never afterwards necessary when once the tools are complete and his laboratory furnished with all he wants for his work."[24]

But the finest product of the school of Alexandria is no doubt saint Athanasius. This is what The editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers say about him,

"Athanasius is the grandest figure of the primitive ages since the Apostles fell asleep. Raised up to complete their testimony to the eternal Logos, and to suffer like them. ... He is the perpetual gnomon of the Alexandrian School. Its testimony, its prescription, its harmony and unity are all summed up in him."[25]

As an 18 year old deacon at Alexandria, he could foresee the danger to the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, posed by a Lybian priest called Arius. Arius propagated an innocent sounding hymn among the people of Alexandria. The hymn said, "There was a time when the Father was and the Son was not."

Athanasius could see the enormous implications. If the Son came into being later than the Father, then he was created and cannot be equal to the father in His divinity, and the whole belief in the Holy Trinity would be destroyed. He started to fight, what would become the battle of his whole life, to uphold the biblical truth of the divinity of the Son. Declaring that the Logos is Co-eternal and Co-Essential with the Father. Before he was 20, he had already written his masterpiece, "Concerning the incarnation of the Word of God," A classic that is relevant today as it was relevant 16 centuries ago.[26]

We here about him at Nicea, the first Ecumenical council that was held to discuss this heresy that divided the whole church, as a deacon standing beside the blessed Alexander 19th Pope of Alexandria, refuting Arius until the heresy was condemned by the 318 bishops assembled there. The greatest trophy that Athanasius and Alexander brought back with them from Nicea was the Creed.

When Alexander reposed in the Lord, Athanasius was chosen to succeed him as the 20th Pope of Alexandria, while yet to reach 30 years of age. For the next 40 years, he made his life mission the eradication of the error of Arianism.

When Constantine, the Roman Emperor then offered to mediate between him and Arius, he firmly but politely told him, "Matters of the state are adjudicated by Emperors, matters of faith are adjudicated by bishops of the Church, thus becoming the first in history to uphold the doctrine of separation between Church and state. Five Times exiled from his seat in Alexandria, he spent many years as a fugitive from one emperor or another. 16 Roman Emperors in all, he had to contend with, but in the end, he outlived them all.

There came a time, during his life long struggle to uphold the Biblical truth, when it seemed that all was lost; when even his friends would look at him with pity saying, alas, the world is against Athanasius. But he was never shaken, "and Athanasius is against the world," he would answer.

Here is a man that proved that the whole world can be wrong! A man that took on the whole world and won it back to Christ.

His victory was in the end complete, and the last 7 years of his life were spent in peace, being consulted by other bishops around the world, who revered him and considered him "the bishop of the world."[27]

THE PLACE OF THE BIBLE IN THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH

The Egyptian church is a deeply liturgical church. It has some of the oldest and most authentic liturgies in Christendom. But it is equally true that the liturgies of the Egyptian church are deeply biblical. A critic of St. Basil's Coptic Liturgy, dismisses it as "nothing more than a biblical patchwork."

I personally think that this is the nicest thing that was ever said about our Liturgy! Nothing more than a Biblical patchwork. And indeed it is! I have an old copy of the liturgy that goes back to the 19th century, it is falling apart but it is very dear to me. It is filled with footnotes on every page, that link every phrase in the text with the biblical verse from which it is literally taken. So, when we chant our Liturgy, we are actually chanting the Bible!

But this "Liturgy of the faithful" is preceded by the teaching part of the Liturgy, which we call "The Liturgy of the word."

This part has readings from the Bible that vary according to the day and the season of the church calendar.

The readings on a typical Sunday morning service would include, a selection from one of the Pauline Epistles, a selection from one of the non-Pauline or catholic Epistles, a selection from the acts of the Apostles and two selections from the gospels.

The Gospel reading is treated differently, it is first preceded by a prayer, in which we ask God to make us worthy to hear and to act according to the Gospel reading we are about to hear. Then the deacon exhorts the people, "Stand with the fear of God, let us hear the holy Gospel." The Gospel is then read.

Because we believe that we hear the Gospel as if it were from Christ Himself, the reader proclaims before commencing the reading, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!" It is customary for the person with the highest priestly rank to read the Bible, out of reverence. So the priest normally reads it, but if a Bishop is around, he would have the honour, and if the Pope is around, he would be the reader.

Because we believe that the Old Testament, and especially the Book of Psalms contain the shadows of the things revealed to us in the Gospels, every Gospel reading is preceded by selected Psalm versicles, that link that particular reading of the Gospel to its prophetic counter-part in the Psalms.

During Lent the readings are expanded to include selections from the Old Testament Books, as well as readings from what the Western Churches call Apocrypha, and what we consider as Deutero-canonical or secondary canonical books.

As we enter the Holy Week, the service becomes wholly a service of the word. The Eucharist is suspended except for Holy Thursday, the day on which the Lord instituted the Eucharist.

There are usually two services for every day of the holy week, one in the morning and one in the evening. Each service will have five selections from the Gospels, with their corresponding Psalm versicles, and between five and ten selections from the Old testament.

on Good Friday, the service starts in the morning and ends shortly before 6 p.m. The service traces all the events of Good Friday in their chronological order, through the prophesies in the Old Testament that prophetically fore-shadowed the event, then the Psalm versicles that relate to the event, followed by the narratives from all four Gospels. There are also hymns and praises appropriate for the occasion.

The service resumes at midnight (six hours later) with the Vigil service of Holy Saturday. The Biblical content of this service is staggering, with selections from the Old and New testaments and the Deutero-canonicals. Even the hymns that are sung are taken from the Bible. At 4 o'clock in the morning, the service reaches its high point, when the congregation takes turns in read aloud the Book of Revelation from beginning to end. It is this that gives the service its common name, "The vigil of the Apocalypse."

The service ends at 7 a.m. with the Eucharist. Our children love this service, according to them, it is "the most fun night of the year," they usually invite their schoolmates to attend with them.

Easter service starts 12 hours later at 7 p.m. It is a relatively short service, lasting only til midnight.

The only way to appreciate these deeply Biblical services is to attend one. So, come and join us some day! The services

are mostly in English, except for the odd hymn in Greek or Coptic. Service books to help you follow the service are plenty. We will even assign one of our deacons to explain to you what is going on.